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ABSTRACT

One hundred first year scholars in highly selective programs in five American universities took part in a preliminary study of outstanding high school graduates and the teachers who had contributed in special ways to their academic success. Fifty-three teachers who were identified by the scholars participated in the study by providing information about themselves and by commenting on selected aspects of teaching and teacher preparation. These teachers were most frequently highly experienced in teaching; a large majority of them held masters degrees, and as a group they had been above average, academically, as undergraduate students. The students and the teachers they identified as having been important to academic success, generally agreed upon the characteristics of outstanding teachers. Characteristics of an affective nature were most frequently mentioned by both students and teachers. One characteristic selected by the majority of both groups was the ability to motivate and challenge students. It is suggested that more studies should focus on the interactive relations of teacher and student. (JD)

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TEACHING EXCELLENCE:

PERSPECTIVES OF FIRST YEAR UNIVERSITY SCHOLARS AND THEIR HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS

Milton E. Ploghoft

Gary Moden

A study conducted by the Center for Higher Education
College of Education, Ohio University
Athens, Ohio

With the support of a grant from the
Ohio University Foundation

March, 1989

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The cooperation of outstanding first year scholars in five American universities was the first step in this attempt to learn more about teaching excellence from students who had attained a considerable measure of excellence themselves. The willingness of a select group of their high school teachers to participate in the study has, of course, added insights of a critical quality. The names of the scholars and their teachers are presented in an appendix of the report.

The initial enthusiasm for the study that was expressed by President Dale Nitzschke of Marshall University, convinced us to proceed. Dr. Frank Borkowski, Provost at the University of South Carolina, Dr. John Mangieri, Graduate Dean at Texas Christian University, Dr. Joe Ryan, Dean of Education at Northwest Missouri State University, and Dr. William Day, Dean of the School of Business Administration at Ohio University provided the linkages necessary to involve their outstanding first year scholars in the study. Dr. Frank Grispino, Acting Dean of Education at Northwest Missouri State University, Dr. William Denman, Director of the Chuck Yeager Society of Scholars at Marshall, Dr. John Gardner Vice Chancellor, University of South Carolina and Herschel McNabb, Assistant Dean of Business Administration at Ohio University were most helpful in a variety of ways to assure that the study would be completed.

Dr. Sam Crowl, Dean of Ohio University's University College and Dr. George Klare, Distinguished Professor of Psychology at Ohio

University provided leadership to the colloquium which was held in October to consider the results and implications of the study. Research assistants Michael Byron and Charles Harrington kept the project on schedule.

A grant from the Ohio University Foundation supported the study at all points, including the publication of this report. Of course, the support of Dean Allen Myers of the College of Education and many other colleagues, so often taken for granted, is acknowledged here.

Milton E. Ploghoft, Director
Center for Higher Education

Dr. Gary Moden, Director
Institutional Research
Ohio University

PERSPECTIVES ON EXCELLENCE: SCHOLARS AND THEIR TEACHERS

The chronic national discontent with American education in the 1980's has led to a number of studies and reports by high level commissions spearheaded by the Reagan commission and its assessment of a nation which was at risk due to serious deficiencies in its schools and their teachers. Schemes for the empowerment of teachers, plans for creating career ladders and requirements for competency examinations for new teachers were among the remedies that have been suggested by one commission or another. State departments of education and teacher education groups, principally the Holmes Group, responded to criticisms by devising programs that would, on the one hand, require competency examination of new teachers and, on the other, require sizeable increases in the "content" courses and a decrease in courses which deal with pedagogy.

N. L. Gage has observed that "for whatever reasons, as the four commission reports demonstrate, much thinking about education has found it possible to focus on almost every conceivable part of the enterprise except its central process: the teaching function."[1] Two decades earlier, Harold Howe II, then commissioner of the United States Office of Education, had pointed to pedagogy for the primary solutions to the shortcomings of the school.[2]

Several recent studies of student perceptions will be briefly reported as background to this study, but it should be noted that few, if any, studies have been concerned with the perceptions of

extremely able students and their teachers regarding the most crucial characteristics of highly effective teachers.

Snyder's study of student perceptions of their teachers, a 1982 follow up study of students who were sophomores in 1980, asked the students to identify the characteristics that they considered very important in their teachers. Eighty four (84%) percent of them indicated that "enjoying teaching and making clear presentations" were important, 81% identified "patience, understanding and treating students with respect," and 66% of the students saw "not talking above students' levels of comprehension" as being important.[3]

Ronald Fox and associates studied student evaluations of teachers as a measure of teacher behavior and impact on sixth grade students. The three teacher behaviors that were the strongest predictors of the students' favorable evaluations were

Kindly and understanding

Systematic and organized

Stimulating and inventive.

Fox found that student achievement, general attitude and socio-economic status did not account for any variance in the students' evaluations of their teachers.[4]

On a related topic, it is instructive to note the study of Guyton and Farokhi which was concerned with the relationships among academic performance, basic skills, success on Teacher Performance Assessment Instrument and Teacher Certification Test.

Approximately 700 teacher education graduates were involved in the study which found that

> Basic skill ability is a good predictor of subject matter knowledge.
>
> Basic skill attainment is not related to on the job teaching performance.
>
> Equating knowledge in a content field with the ability to teach is not supported by research on the question.[5]

Why has there been such a widespread reluctance to consider pedagogy along with finance, curriculum, mainstreaming and certification of teachers in the recent studies of American education? It is admittedly speculative, but it appears that politicians, professors, parents and a good number of teachers prefer to look into the rear view mirror when describing educational problems. When prescribing remedies for the perceived educational ailments, it is not then surprising that the perennial critics are like 18th century physicians, treating the vapors, ague and snake bite with leeches, sheep nanny tea and fresh cabbage leaves. More homework, more tests, more failure, more behavioral objectives are the nostrums of the 80's.

Now the concern is once again national security, as it was following Sputnik in the 50's and there is a call for "social efficiency" in a curriculum that will better prepare us to compete with the burgeoning common market nations and the little dragons of the Pacific Rim. And once again the perennialists have seized

the opportunity to identify a life adjustment, vocationally oriented curriculum as the culprit, much as did Mortimer Smith, Arthur Bestor and Bernard Iddings Bell in the 50's.[6] It was generally assumed by the leading critics of the 50's that "bad pedagogy" must indeed accompany the perceived shortcomings in the curriculum and, if the parents and liberal arts professors would take control of the schools from the "interlocking directorate" of professional educators, notable improvements in learning would follow.

The same criticisms have emerged again in the 80's and similar remedies are proposed, regardless of the vast array of social, technological, political, and, educational changes that have occurred over 30 years.

The Scholars and Their Teachers

In view of the continuing controversies it seems both appropriate and timely to examine some aspects of excellence through the eyes of teachers and students who have had first hand experience with educational excellence. Accordingly, one hundred first year scholars in highly selective programs in five American universities were invited to take part in a preliminary study of outstanding high school graduates and the teachers who had contributed in special ways to their academic success. This approach, and this aspect of excellence, were chosen because of the assumption that what teachers do has much to do with excellence in students. This seemed needed since the four most widely publicized educational

reform reports were silent on matters of pedagogy. It was expected that a study of excellent teachers, identified by their scholars, would be of interest to those groups concerned with the reform of teacher education and to professors who are deeply involved with the first year experience of students on their campuses.

The University of South Carolina, Marshall University, Northwest Missouri State University, Texas Christian University and Ohio University, five universities that have special scholar programs, agreed to assist with the study by providing names and addresses of the first year students in these programs. All other information was provided by the 74 students who participated by completing and returning the forms that were sent to them.

Only the Copeland scholars at Ohio University were specialized in one field, that being Business. The Carolina scholars, the Chuck Yeager scholars at Marshall, the President's scholars at Northwest Missouri and the Regent's scholars at Texas Christian were interested in a variety of program majors. The scholars came from 74 different high schools in 17 different states.

Fifty three (53) of the 74 teachers who were identified by the scholars responded to an invitation to participate by providing information about themselves and by commenting on selected aspects of teaching and teacher preparation.

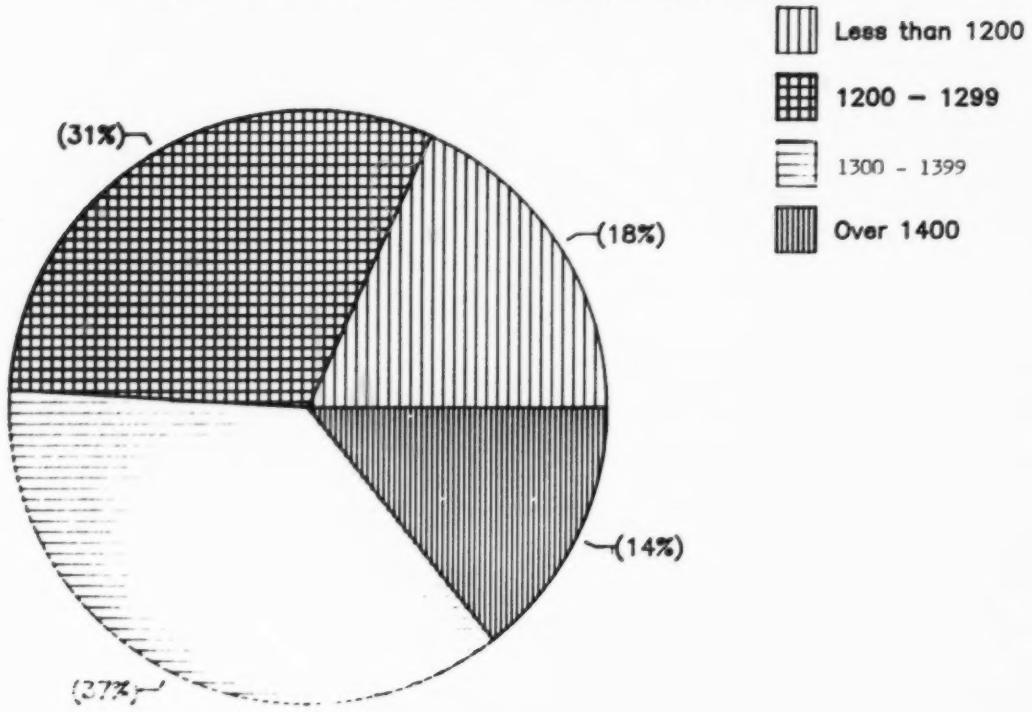
The first year scholars who participated in this study were young, (traditional in this respect) with an age range of 17 to 20 years, a mean of 18.3 years. Forty nine (49) scholars reported SAT scores ranging from 1020 to 1490 with a mean of 1290. Fifty five

(55) scholars reported ACT scores ranging from 25 to 33 with a mean of 28.4. (Figure 1) Twenty one scholars were valedictorians and 11 were salutatorians in their graduating classes. Mean class rank was 6.8 although the wide variation in size of the graduating classes diminished the significance of this statistic. Based on this type of information, and the fact that the selection processes were comprehensive and competitive, it could be concluded that the scholars of the study had indeed demonstrated "excellence" in education. The responding students identified the high school teachers, one each, who had contributed most to their academic success. They were asked to comment on the characteristics that they believed made a particular teacher exceptional.

The fields of study which these first year scholars had selected as majors were diverse, indeed, with no significant concentration in any one discipline. Slightly less than 1/3 of the scholars had selected traditional arts and science majors with the remainder opting for majors in professional fields. The scholars were asked to provide basic demographic information and then were asked to respond to open ended questions pertaining to their career goals, honors and awards received, major areas of study and finally the question, "Why was this teacher so important to your success as a student?" The responses of the scholars were then analyzed and organized into the nine categories shown in Figure 4.

Before considering the teacher characteristics that were identified by the first year scholars, a bit of information regarding their outstanding teachers may be helpful.

SAT SCORES OF SCHOLARS



ACT SCORES OF SCHOLARS

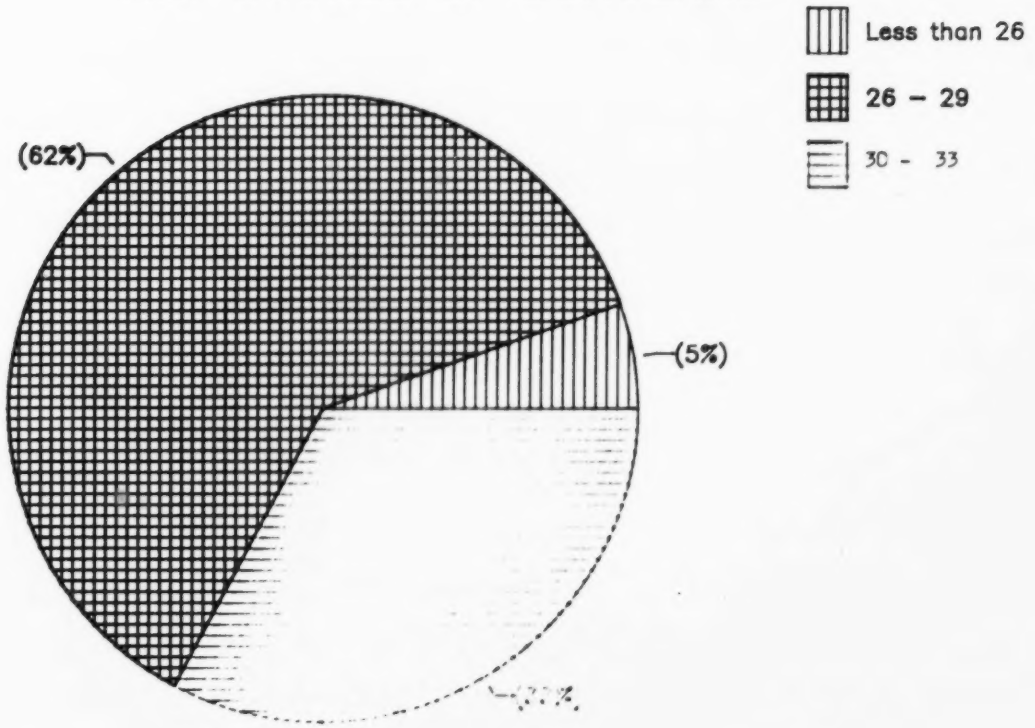


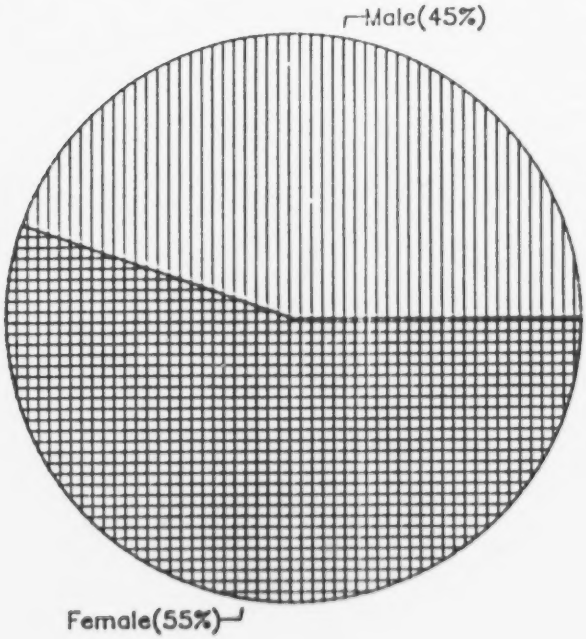
Figure 1

Outstanding teachers of first year scholars were most frequently highly experienced in teaching and accordingly, only a small percentage of them were under 30 years of age. A large majority of these teachers hold the masters degree. As a group, the teachers were above average, academically, as undergraduate students. (See Figure 6)

Slightly more than half of the teachers were female, as was the case with the scholars in the study. (Figure 2) Their ages ranged from 25 years to 62 years with a mean of 42. No teacher had less than 4 years teaching experience; the mean was 17.2 years and the maximum was 39 years. History, mathematics and English were the undergraduate majors of more than half of the teachers. It is important to note that the respondents did not differentiate between English education and English, mathematics and mathematics education, and so on, in identifying their undergraduate majors. The mean undergraduate grade point average of the teachers was slightly less than B+.

Nearly 1/4 of the selected teachers were English teachers, 1/5 were mathematics teachers, 1/8 were history teachers and 1/10 were teachers of government, together comprising about 66 percent of the total. It should be noted that only 13 percent of the first year scholars had chosen those fields for major study as undergraduates. (see Figure 3)

SEX OF SCHOLARS



SEX OF TEACHERS

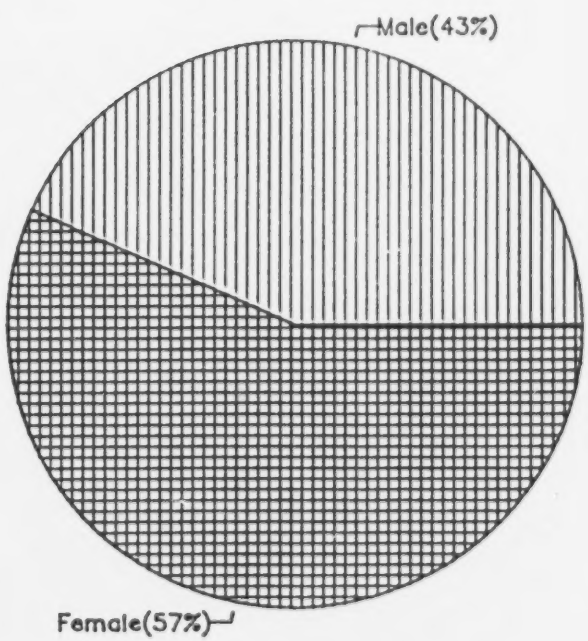
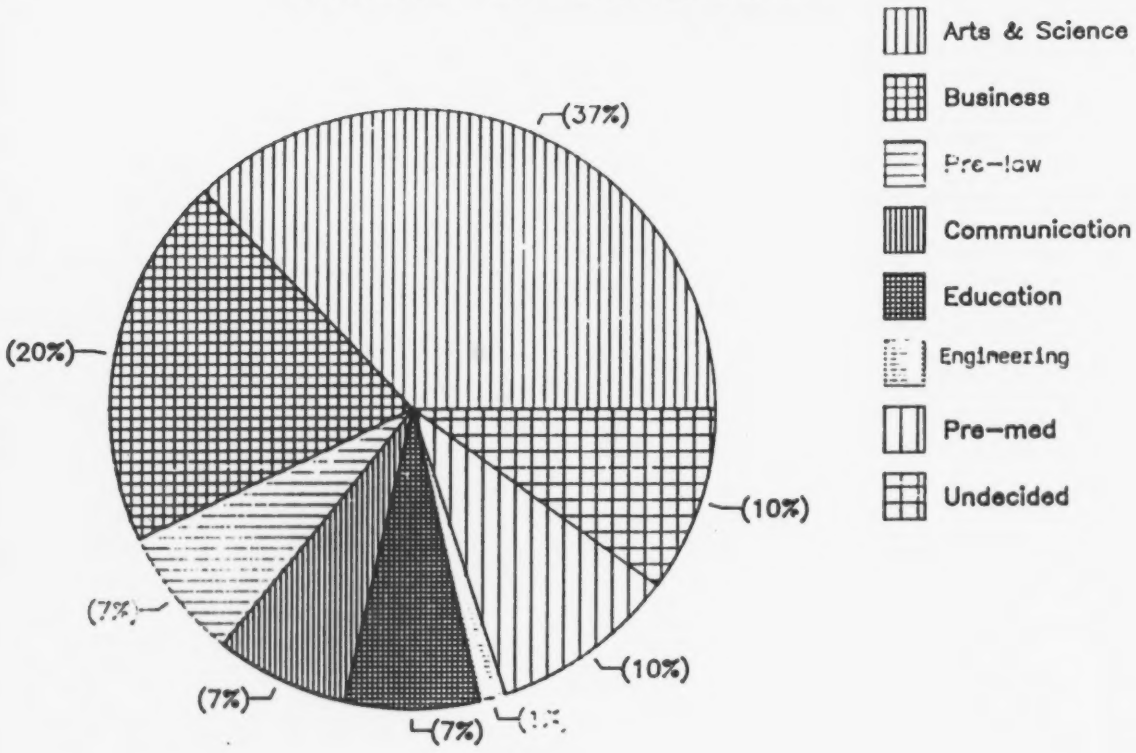


Figure 2

MAJORS OF SCHOLARS



AREA OF TEACHING

English	31%
Mathematics	22%
History	13%
Government	11%
Chemistry	7%
Physics	4%
Psychology	2%
Modern Languages	2%
Sociology	2%
General Business	2%
Journalism	2%
Music	2%

Figure 3

Aspects of Excellent Teaching

The first year college scholars, and the high school teachers whom they identified as having been important to academic success, generally agreed upon the characteristics of outstanding teachers. Characteristics of an affective nature were most frequently mentioned by both students and teachers. Only on one characteristic, however, did a majority in both groups agree, that being the "motivating and challenging" item. On other characteristics which were mutually identified, the strength of agreement often involved only 20% of the two groups. It is appropriate to point out, however, that there was much stronger consensus when the characteristics are regarded as either affective or cognitive in nature, and here the affective factors predominated the responses of both groups. (See figure 4)

It may be noted that the characteristics identified by the scholars seem to overlap and to be interrelated. Four of the nine items appear to be well within the affective domain and perhaps, a fifth, "professional attitude" must be affective by definition.

The teachers were asked to respond to the question, "In what special ways do you think that you contribute to the success of your students?" Figure 5 contains information regarding the percentage of teachers who identified various ways of contributing to student success. Teachers and students agreed with respect to the two most frequently identified characteristics although a significantly larger percentage of students identified "showed interest in student" as an important characteristic. One fourth

WHY WAS TEACHER IMPORTANT TO SUCCESS

Motivated and Challenged	72%
Showed Interest in Student	50%
Professional Attitude	28%
Helpful and Accessible	26%
Prepared Student for College	23%
Enjoyed Teaching	22%
Knew Subject Area	18%
Stressed Importance of Education	12%
Made Subject Apply	7%

Figure 4

HOW TEACHER CONTRIBUTED TO SUCCESS OF STUDENT

Motivated and Challenged	68%
Showed Interest in Student	28%
Developed Respect/Trust	25%
Developed Critical Competencies	23%
Knew Subject Area	17%
Helpful and Accessible	15%
Class Preparation	11%

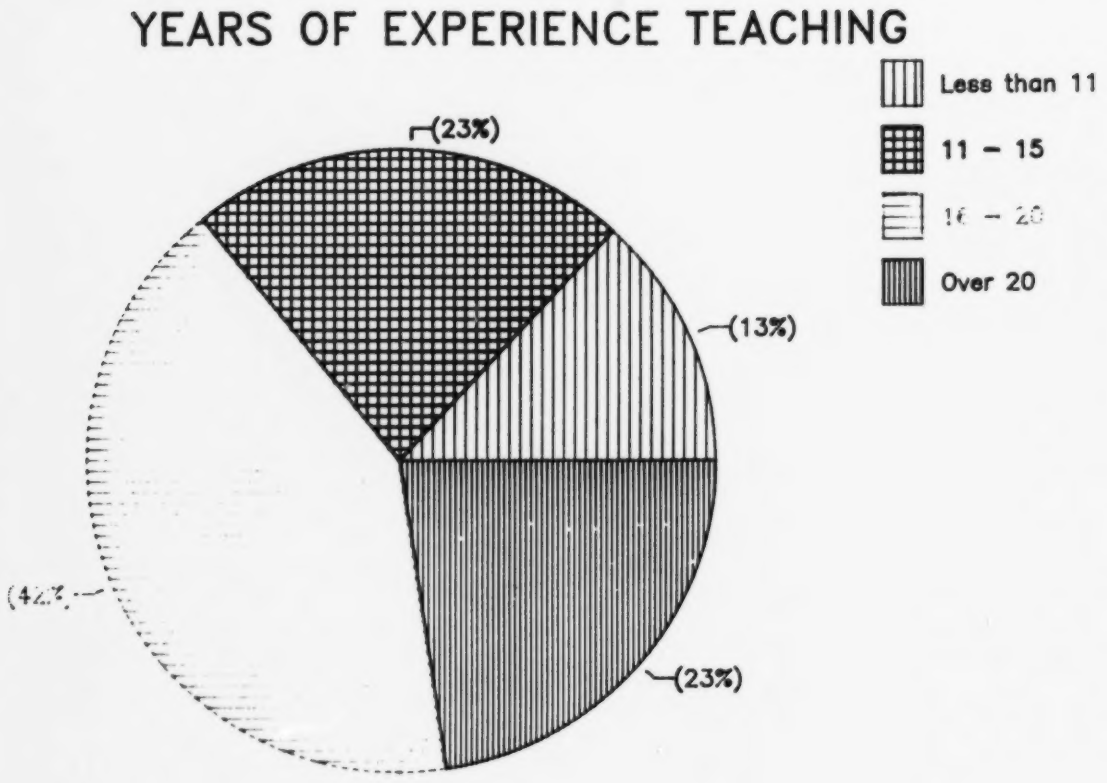
Figure 5

of the teachers mentioned "respect and trust" while 28% of the students listed "professional attitude" which may imply a similar dimension.

Fewer than one in five teachers and students identified "knew subject area" as an important characteristic. It is appropriate to mention that, in a follow up colloquium, students and teachers observed that this was a necessary component of good teaching, but one which depended upon other enabling qualities. The teachers, as was the case with the students, identified affective characteristics as major features of outstanding teaching performance.

Teacher Preparation

There was a variety of responses to the questions related to the strengthening of teacher education and the extent to which the bachelor's degree program contribute to the development of successful teachers. Most commonly agreed upon by the teachers was the importance of having only outstanding teachers working with student teachers and with the "field experience" components of the teacher education program. There were teachers who believed their methods courses to have been of great value, others who saw them as worthless. There was agreement to the effect that professors of pedagogy should have periodic teaching assignments in the schools. There were teachers who saw their "general studies" as being valuable, others who saw no relevance to their work as teachers. It may be that the great variations on responses to these items


YEARS OF EXPERIENCE TEACHING
Less than 11
11 - 15
16 - 20
Over 20
(23%)
(13%)
(42%)
(23%)

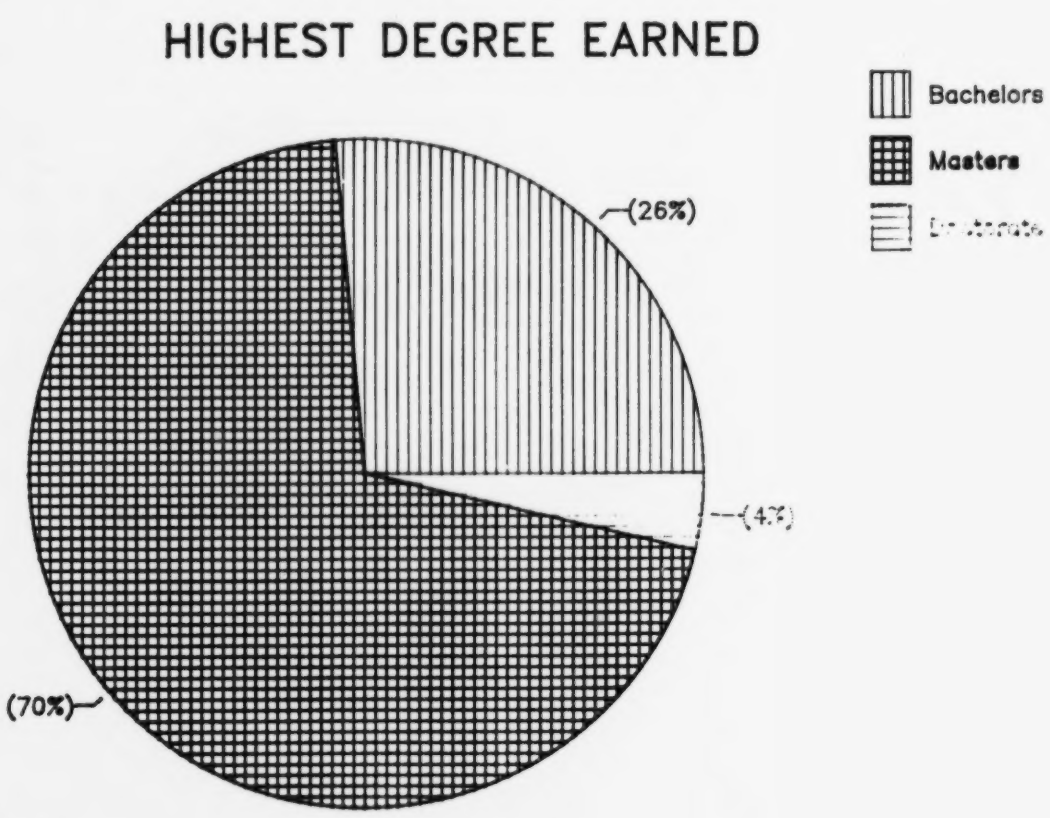

HIGHEST DEGREE EARNED
Bachelors
Masters
(26%)
(4%)
(70%)

Figure 6

were due, in part, to age and experience factors but this possible relationship was not examined.

Conclusions

Excellent students do not differ from the general student population with respect to their perceptions of the most important characteristics of effective teachers; affective features are rated highly by excellent and average students alike.

The high school teachers who were identified by first year scholars as having made outstanding contribution to their academic success are in widespread agreement with respect to the high value of affective aspects of teaching, a position that is shared by the scholars who selected them.

Teachers who were selected as "most outstanding" by the scholars had slightly above average collegiate academic records, suggesting that teachers who are very effective with excellent students need not be academically outstanding themselves. It appears that factors, other than academic, are at work in the teaching-learning process, and that these factors are seen by teachers and students alike as being very important to academic achievement.

Gender was not a factor in the students' selection of their outstanding teachers, nor were the scholars' choices of college majors directly related to the teaching fields of the teachers who were selected. Although the study was not particularly concerned with the age and experience of the teachers, it is apparent that

the choices of highly experienced teachers, hence older in years, were out of proportion to the percentage of those teachers in the total population of American secondary teachers.

IMPLICATIONS

The results of this study point to the need for experimental studies to determine how those affective dimensions of teaching that outstanding scholars have identified as being so critical, can indeed be developed during the teacher preparation experience. Information from observational and correlational studies points clearly to the dominant role which affective qualities play in the teaching-learning process.

While it is commonly recognized that affective factors are more difficult to develop than are cognitive skills and concepts, the overwhelming inclination of teacher educators and their colleagues in other disciplines to concentrate so exclusively upon the cognitive aspects of education does not appear to be justified. Continuing complexities associated with personality assessment, as example, do not justify omitting personality as an important element to be taken into account in the selection and education of teachers.

The long standing notion, advanced by many teachers, that affective elements of teaching are most critical when working with average and below average students is dispelled by this study of scholars and their teachers.

Further study of the relative impacts of affective and cognitive dimensions of the teaching process is certainly needed. In actual school settings, it would be useful to investigate student performance with "high affect" teachers who are no more than average academically and to also, investigate student performance with "low affect-high academic" teachers. Questions such as the following deserve further study:

Why do teachers prefer to use one teaching method over another?

Why do some teachers make the student the focal point of the teaching-learning process while other teachers devote first allegiance to their subject matter?

Why do some teachers (and administrators) point to the few students who are merit scholars as the primary indicators of the success of their schools?

Why are some teachers uncomfortable with student participation in setting goals for learning and in choosing alternate paths to attainment of such goals?

Without further belaboring the question, it seems that affective factors have much to do with the answers that various teachers give to such questions.

OBSERVATIONS

The results of this probe into aspects of teacher excellence suggest that leading study commissions and reform groups have disregarded the most critical component of the educational process, the interactive relation of teacher, student and content that makes up the thing called "teaching". Additional work in the liberal arts does not appear to address the affective dimensions that are so critical to excellent teaching, nor does the addition of more field experience, more methods courses and more cognitive based tests of teacher competence.

Dimensions of personality may indeed provide indicators of teacher excellence of the kind identified by students and teachers alike in this study. But, it is often pointed out that instruments for assessing personality are lacking in validity and reliability, hence that avenue should not be pursued in efforts to improve both the selection and preparation of teachers. The consequence appears to be a continuation of the use of approaches that are not responsive to the complex problems associated with selection, preparation and in-service support of effective teachers.

Selection of students for teacher education programs must take into account personality as well as academic qualities.

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ENDNOTES

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5. Edith Guyton and Elizabeth Farokhi, "Relationships Among Academic Performance, Basic Skills, Subject Matter Knowledge, and Teaching Skills of Teacher Education Graduates." Journal of Teacher Education 38:37-42, Sept./Oct. 1987.

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COLLOQUIUM COMMENTS

EXCELLENCE AND TEACHERS: REACTIONS AND COMMENTS

by

John N. Mangieri

Dean, Graduate Studies and Research

Texas Christian University

It is a pleasure to be given an opportunity to review this study. I commend the researchers for the design and content of this investigation. The study's findings hold significant implications for higher education in general, and teacher education in particular. While many dimensions of the study are noteworthy, I will comment upon five aspects of it.

First, in looking at the most frequently cited content fields of the outstanding teachers, I noted an absence of individuals with specializations in the natural sciences. It is well documented that our country faces a shortage of qualified science teachers for the elementary and secondary grades. There is also a shortage of American students receiving the Ph.D. degree in areas of the natural sciences. Are the aforementioned conditions attributable (at least in part) to a scarcity of teachers who are not perceived as outstanding by students?

Second, it is regrettable that the study did not distinguish

between English education and English, mathematics education and mathematics, etc. regarding the academic major field of study for the first year scholars. This information would better indicate the degree to which those who chose education as a career selected the same academic major in college as the content field of the teacher identified by him/her. I would recommend that this be included in subsequent studies.

Third, the data show that certain teachers have "made a difference" in the lives of scholars. In the vernacular of psychologists, the teachers would represent "significant others" to these scholars. Also, in instances where scholars have chosen to become teachers, one can speculate as to the direct impact that the outstanding teachers have had upon the career choice of these scholars. These findings, stressing favorable dimensions of the teaching profession, are a refreshing contrast to the adverse statements frequently made about teachers.

Fourth, none of the most frequently cited characteristics of excellent teachers are subject-matter specific, rather, the characteristics can be categorized as being in the affective and professional domains. This aspect of the study contradicts the opinion of critics of teacher education, who contend that students are most impressed by the depth of a teacher's mastery of a content field, as well as those who argue that

professional education programs in teaching should be curtailed in favor of liberal arts specializations.

Finally, I am intrigued with the plethora of investigations that could be conducted as follow-ups to this one. For example, what teaching characteristics would be held in high esteem by low-ability students? Would the content fields of the selected teachers have been different if the freshmen were of lesser academic ability?

In closing, let me again commend the researchers for conducting this meritorious investigation. Its findings are important per se, but its major contribution to the field of education may be the discussion it will generate and the subsequent studies that will emanate from it.

REFLECTIONS ON THE COLLOQUIUM:
Perspectives on Excellence
Ohio University Center for Higher Education
October 3-4, 1988

While many state departments of education and local boards of education are concerned with reform that can be quantitatively measured, this appears to be an incorrect approach. The purpose of education should be to create a flexibility of mind that broadens an individual's frame of reference. Critical and reflective thought should be the primary concern of education, regardless of the level or subject matter. With the constantly and rapidly changing nature of modern society, it is nothing short of foolish to concentrate merely on what might be regarded as "relevant." To focus upon mastering a specific body of knowledge is to disregard this ever changing world.

Preparing students to teach is a rather awesome task under the best of circumstances. Once competence in subject matter is assured, attention should be given to interpersonal relationships. The ability to listen to what another is saying is an extremely important characteristic. It is quite difficult to accept ideas that conflict with one's own. Nevertheless, student responsiveness is dependent upon creating an atmosphere conducive to learning and thinking. If the focus of the classroom is solely upon the teacher, such an atmosphere is impossible to maintain. Students need to be encouraged to think for themselves. Acceptance of even erroneous ideas is necessary to prevent discouraging them. This also serves the function of raising students' expectations of themselves. Perhaps the single most important factor to convey to potential teachers is for them to see only the individual. One teaches an individual, not a class. The thought process takes place within an individual's mind and not the vagueness of a classroom. It is the individual student who is important, not a class or a school.

If there is an increased concern for thoughtfulness and flexibility at the secondary level, then it is essential that these attributes be reinforced at the university level. The university has always been perceived of as a forum for the free interchange of ideas. Many of the students participating in the colloquium, while making passing reference to the importance of ideas, still placed most of their concerns upon the practical. The function of the university should be to make beginning scholars aware of the constantly shifting world of ideas and move them away from the desire merely to master content. However, if the professors are not aware or unconcerned it is impossible for the students to be aware.

As a final thought, education in the United States does indeed have a crisis to contend with. Unfortunately, it is not one that can readily be resolved by professional educators at the university or secondary level. It is clearly a reflection of changing values within the society as a whole. To improve dramatically the quality of education, it is necessary to recapture and reclaim the idealism that was prevalent in earlier time periods. Teaching needs to be once again perceived of as the honorable and respected profession it is, one that contributes to the future well being of the nation. Preparing future teachers to be sensitive to the concerns and needs of the individual may be one small step in this direction.

Respectfully submitted,

Michael L. Seewer

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October 21, 1988

Dr. Milton E. Ploghoft, Director
Center for Higher Education
Ohio University College of Education
Athens, Ohio 45701-2979

Dear Dr. Ploghoft:

I feel so fortunate to have been a part of the recent colloquium sponsored by your department. I feel that the time was well spent and added much to my concerns and feelings about teaching. It has been an extremely busy time since I returned from the conference but I have been able to share some of the information with my fellow teachers. All agree that this is the kind of activity the regular classroom teacher should be exposed to in order to have input into the whole realm of teaching and teacher training.

Again, thank you so much for inviting me to attend and being a contributing member of the coloquium. I am including a short summary of my impressions and ideas from the meeting. I hope this will be of some benefit in concluding and publishing your findings.

If I may be of further assistance to you, please do no hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

Roger G McCune

Roger G. McCune
Resource Teacher, Gifted Ed.

Perspectives on Excellence: First Year Scholars and Their Teachers
Colloquium Participants

October 3-4, 1988

Dr. John Mangieri, Dean of Graduate Studies & Research, Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, Texas

Dr. Frank Grispino, Dean of Education, Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, Missouri

Dr. William N. Denman, Director, Society of Yeager Scholars, Marshall University, Huntington, West Virginia

Dr. Herschel McNabb, Assistant Dean, College of Business Administration, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio

Dr. Fritz Hess, Superintendent, East Syracuse-Minoa Central Schools, East Syracuse, New York

Mr. Roger G. McCune, Outstanding Teacher, Parkersburg High School, Parkersburg, West Virginia

Dr. Michael Seewer, Outstanding Teacher, Fairborn High School, Fairborn, Ohio

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